

## Mercury Falling

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Summary: "You said you'd always believe." He doesn't mean to say it, but the words come out anyways, and then he's screaming, into the winds, as loud as he can, because there's no one left to hear anyways. "You promised that you'd always believe!" / Rise of the Brave Tangled Dragons, implied Jack/Hiccup.

## Mercury Falling

**\*\*A/N\*\*** \_I can't help but love this crossover- it just fits so well, in so many ways. I really wanted to write them, but somehow that urge materialized in the form of angst. Well. Sorry, sort of? Also, forgive any OOC-ness on Rapunzel's part; I haven't seen Tangled for ages and can barely remember her, whoops.\_

**\*\*Rated K plus\*\*** \_basically for angst\_

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><p>The road is emptier than usual, probably due to the copious amounts of snow swirling and tumbling through the glowing air of the late evening, lining the stony sides of the pathway and reddening the noses of all those who do choose to brave the cold. Icicles rim the cabins all along the twisting mountainside, and frost patterns weave themselves into existence on every flat surface, glittering under the last strain of honeyed sunlight, breaking to make way for the soft silver wash of the moon that crests the horizon and sends long ripples of colorlessness through the water surrounding the island of Berk.<p>

Nobody sees the young man darting over the roofs with an inhuman lightness, a worn shepherd's crook in his hand and a wide grin on his face, but that's alright, because no one ever does. None of \_them,

\_anywaysâ€"normal people, he thinks, his smirk widening even farther. People who lived amongst \_dragons \_and still refused to accept the most obvious fantasies of all. They used to hurt him, what with their virtual blindness, but he knows better nowâ€"he's not impossible to see. All he ever had to do was wait. Wait for the right people, and now he has, and it's time to finally see them again, or at least one of them. After years apart, years of spreading ice across the globe on his ownâ€"decades, even, but right now, he doesn't feel a single one of the years weighing down on him.

In fact, the agility with which he moves only increases as he approaches the hunched, fur-coated figure at which he's aimed. He can't help but laugh, the sound bubbling out of his mouth as he somersaults through the air, alternately supported by the wind or his staff as it scratches along the crude shingles of the roof below him. The light blizzard whistles in his ears, and he whoops into the oncoming night, greeting it like the old friend whom he's finally about to see again.

"Hiccupâ€"hey! Hiccup!" he calls out jubilantly, pitching himself off the roof in a wide leap. He touches down lightly on the ground, his knees barely bending, then whips his shepherd's crook up, resting it on his shoulder as he strolls up to the older man making his way along the path.

"Hic-\_cup\_," Jack half-whines, not even bothering to fight down the wide grin almost paining his cheeks. It really has been a long timeâ€"too long, far too long since he's gotten the chance to see his old friend. And the aging is clear on Hiccup's face, even if it isn't on Jack'sâ€"a fact which the physically younger man can't help but joke about as he follows him along.

"Wow, is that a beard? I wouldn't have thought you were the type. What else have you got, then? A wife? Oh, man, if you have kidsâ€"they'd better believe in Jack Frost, or you'll have a lot of explaining to do. Heyâ€"\_Hiccup!\_" he half-shouts as he's completely walked past. He sighs, rolling his eyes in an exaggerated motion and glancing up towards the moon, as if hoping it will share his exasperation. "Seriouslyâ€"okay, I can understand how you'd be just a bit hard of hearing, but did something totally fry your eardrums? Because I'm \_rightâ€"here!"\_

He unashamedly yells the last two words, leaping in the air and landing right in front of his old friend, arms thrown out, teeth glittering in his biggest smile yet. He waitsâ€"waits for acknowledgement, for a look of surprised delight in those familiar hazel eyes, for a smile on the still-freckled face.

What he gets is a horrible, horrible chill, a deep shudder that pierces him to the very bone marrow as Hiccup walks straight through him.

He can't help but gasp, his crook falling and cracking the icy ground as his hands fly to his chest, to feel it, reassure himself that he's still there, still solid and alive andâ€"visible. His lungs heave in desperate disbelief, the aftereffects of the stomach-jerking chill still scraping through him as he desperately clutches handfuls of his own loose tunic, staring down at its brown drabness, trying to comprehend, to understand.

"No," he says aloud, quietly. There's nothing strange about talking to himselfâ€"he's used to it. He does it all the time, because nobodyâ€"nobody can hear himâ€"

"No, no, no, no, \_no!\_" He turns on his heel and stumbles after Hiccup, shivering, crying out. "Come on, you can't do this to me! Not now! Youâ€"come on, please!"

There's no response from the man, and for one brief second, Jack wonders whether he's made some sort of mistake, whether this isn't Hiccup after allâ€"but, no, he knew those eyes. He'd know those eyes anywhere.

Still, he chases after him, like that will make the denial easier, continuing to talk so that he doesn't have time to really think.

"Don't do this. Hiccup, please. You've got to remember all that fun we had togetherâ€"that huge hill with Rapunzel and Merida, you remember that, right? You've got to. Theâ€"the snowmen, and the ice patterns, and flyingâ€"please tell me you remember flyingâ€"

He's managed to work himself in front of the other, silent man again, and he pays the price as the sickening ripple of being passed through trembles his core once again. He shakes his head, whispering a string of negatives, but the burning at the back of his eyes has become undeniable, and it hits him now that there's nothing he can do, nothing.

He takes a slow, deep breath, his shoulders slumping, his head tilting down slowly as his mouth falls open in a sharp exhalation. He's facing downhill, and he can see the entirely familiar layout of Berk, which he once did and always will have memorized like the back of his own hand. Downhillâ€"of course, the sledding; this is where he first took Hiccup sledding, tossed him onto a huge slab of tree bark because there was nothing better, sent him shooting down the absurdly steep slope. Of course, Hiccup was yelling and squirming the whole way, but when he brought him out, onto the edge of the ocean, the water of which he froze as they movedâ€"that's when he saw him, for the first time. When they saw each other, really.

Appropriate, maybe, that the place where it starts is also where it ends.

A freezing wind snaps over the ground, and Jack can \_feel \_it, actually feel the cold. A shiver passes through him, and he feels something icy on his cheeks, but he doesn't reach up to touch it. Just slides back down, no longer skipping, but rather kneeling down as he moves along the slope, reaching up to get ahold of his shepherd's crook, lifting it from its prone position on the cracked ice.

"Alright," he says quietly, "fine. I get it. Wind!" he bellows, rising to his tip-toes again, forcing the word out of his lungs and into the yawning emptiness of the sea before him. "To Scotland! We have a princess to visit!"

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><p>Merida's hair, unlike Hiccup's, hasn't begun to lose even a trace

of its color. It still shines just as vibrantly as Jack remembers it, if not more soâ€”like fire or lava, in huge, blazing ringlets that now tumble practically to her ankles. He almost laughs when he sees it, and just the sight of herâ€”still bright-eyed, still redheaded, probably still unmarriedâ€”warms him again, reminds him that just because Hiccup can't see doesn't mean it has to be over. He still has a chance with her, and with Rapunzelâ€”they always were the smartest, after all, the girls were. Keeping this in mind, he does laugh, his toes curling in anticipation as the cool hold of the breeze carries him over the frozen Scottish woodland. Merida stands out like a beacon in all the white, perched on the back of her horseâ€”not Angus, it looks like, but of course he won't have survived this long. It's a younger, lithe creature, dark brown and regal-looking.<p>

"Nice horse," Jack comments softly, crossing his legs and balancing on top of his shepherd's crook as he floats a few yards above her blazing head. "Nice hair, tooâ€”what, are you trying to beat Rapunzel?"

He drops all at once, whisking the staff into one hand and leaning against it casually as he drops right in front of her, his feet crunching in the frozen grass. The horse whinnies in surprise and stumbles to a halt, its hooves scraping the ground, and Merida's pale blue eyesâ€”the color of the waterfall so nearby her home, which is probably raging even through the grip of winter nowâ€”fly wide in shock.

Chuckling, Jack can't help but bow, his heart racing with excitement. "Nice to see you again, princess," he greets, glancing up through the fringe of his own pale hair.

But she's not looking at himâ€”instead, her gaze is skirting anxiously over the woods, and one hand is on her bow, strapped over her back like always. "What is it?" she whispers, leaning in close to whisper in the horse's ear, which then twitches. Her voice is as heavily accented as always, and it's like a blade shoves right between Jack's ribs to tangle in his heartstrings, jerking them about with every syllable from her lips.

The horse snorts and stomps a back leg, shaking its head as if to disengage a flea. Merida sighs and sits up again, letting both of her hands return to her mount's dark mane.

"Still riding bareback?" Jack questions, but this time he doesn't expect an answer. It was stupid, he decides, to ever have thought he'd get one in the first place. "Getting a bit old for that, aren't you?"

She is getting older, even if it isn't showing in her ridiculous hair. There are lines around her eyes and mouthâ€”nothing to render her ancient, but something that speaks of maturity, respectability.

Jack, of course, hates both maturity and respectability. They're overrated and useless, and she used to agree with him, more fervently than any of the rest. And yet here she is nowâ€”still in the woods, sure, still riding, but it's different. She's different. She's changed.

He doesn't want to be surprised when she urges the horse forwards, prods him in the sides until he manages a light trot—a light trot that pierces right through Jack, and even though there's no real pressure, he still trips and falls backwards, hitting the rocky ground heavily, his legs aching with the impact.

For a very long time, he doesn't stand up, doesn't move at all. Only stares up, through the bare, skeletal branches that form the ceiling of the forest, into the daytime sky. And through the pale blue, there's just the barest trace of a moon—a light, ghostly sliver, watching him wordlessly.

"Please," he breathes, hating the way that his voice cracks. "Please don't do this to me. They're all I ever had—you can't take that away from me. You \_can't.\_"

The moon doesn't answer. But, of course, it never does.

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><p>He waits a while for Rapunzel. Several days, perhaps even a week or two. They're spent the usual way—instigating blizzards, creating delicate patterns over windows. Nobody notices, of course, how the subtle swirls of frost carry images with them—perhaps if the residents of a couple of houses cared to look any closer at the ice on their glass, they'd see figures, pale shapes layered in the multi-shaded swirls, of a girl on a horse and a boy on a dragon. They don't look any closer, though, just like he doesn't expect them to.<p>

He can't last forever, though. And so he finds himself in her kingdom earlier than he ever wanted, gazing at the massive castle and cursing himself in a thousand and one ways for being stupid enough to do this. He knows—part of him, at least—what's going to happen, that being here is less of a last hope and more of an official confirmation.

Still, the sight of it all causes his heart to ache, a deep, physical pain that causes him to move his hands to the front of his tunic, trying to hold himself together, to not give up and fall to pieces here, in the brightest kingdom in the world, the one place that positively radiates joy. Unlike in Berk and Scotland, winter causes this place to glow, heaps of glittering snow spilling over pastel cobblestones, light flurries of flakes drifting lightly and sweetly through the air.

He lets the breeze move him, bring him up to each of the windows in turn—he checks every one of them, carefully and thoroughly, brushing his fingers along them and letting a few frost spirals creep from their tips as soon as he confirms that she's not inside. Surely she \_will\_ be inside on a day like today, for despite the ethereally sunny gleam, it truly is cold outside.

It takes him several minutes to find the right window, but when he does, he still feels a swoop in his stomach. He was expecting it to be this one, really—maybe he was all along, but that doesn't diminish the twist inside of him, or the tears instantly, involuntarily biting at the back of his eyes.

It's the banquet hall. And the long, light-wooded table is set, but

only barelyâ€"in fact, there are three gold-rimmed plates, their pearly luster gleaming, a colorful array of food spread over them. Three stemmed crystal goblets, three sets of silver and three creamy napkins spread over the laps of his three friends.

Hiccup and Merida look happy, happier than they did when he encountered them aloneâ€"amazingly so, their faces broken into genuine laughter that seems to sap away years from their visages. And Rapunzel looks positively regal in her older age, her green eyes still sharp. Her hair is different, though, which is perhaps what caused his partially amazed, partially hurt initial reactionâ€"dark brown rather than blazing gold, and cut only to her shoulders, shot through with thick streaks of grey like Hiccup's.

"What happened to you?" he questions disbelievingly, his breath misting the pink-stained glass of the window. He presses his palms against it, and light strands of frost creep from them, curling in on themselves but not blocking his view. "What happened to all of you?"

Her laughterâ€"he can hear it, even through the thick window panes, ringing out purely as ever. Joined with Hiccup's raspy snicker and Merida's snorting giggle, it's enough to feel like a punch straight to Jack's gut, and he actually slips down in the air a bit, has to remind himself to stay afloat. Perhaps what hurts so much is the fact that they don't look unhappy. Quite the opposite, in factâ€"and only logically, because they're all together, right now.

"But what about me?"

He doesn't mean to say the words aloud, but it makes no difference, so he feels no regret in uttering them. The three inside school themselves into slightly more dignified looks, and then Rapunzel is speaking, beaming at the other two. Her voice is just barely audible, and Jack presses his ear against the chilled glass, struggling to hear it better.

"Wow, it really has been a while, hasn't it?"

"Definitely," Hiccup agrees, his fork chasing a pile of peas around his plate. Merida stifles laughter at his struggles, and he playfully shoves her in the shoulder, resulting in an indignant squeak.

"Too long," Jack murmurs in agreement.

"A toast, then," Rapunzel offers, hooking her goblet of dark red liquidâ€"wine, \_Jack realizes, his heart skipping a beatâ€"under her fingers and raising it.

"What to?" Hiccup questions, even as he does the same.

"To being back together, finally," she explains, her eyes moving over both of those opposite her. There's an emotion contained in themâ€"something deep and gentle, overlaid with sparkling warmth. And they're returning it, too. Maybe they can't see it on each other's faces, can't feel it on their own. But from an outsider's point of view, it couldn't be clearer.

An outsider. He doesn't want to be an outsiderâ€"in fact, he rejects the concept with every fiber of his being, burning in desperate

denial.

"And to Jack Frost," Merida adds suddenly, straightening up a bit.

Something jerks inside of him—"twists to the point of breaking, but doesn't quite shatter. For a moment, he completely forgets how to breathe, and he can feel heat flying to his cheeks, throbbing in his mind. His pulse echoes in his ears, and he can barely hear the next words, which come from a laughing Hiccup.

"Jack Frost? Really?"

"Why not?" Merida retorts. "He was one of us, too, right?"

"Well, I guess, but—" I mean, are we actually going to toast over an imaginary friend?"

"Oh, don't be like that, you loved him most of us all," Rapunzel counters teasingly, and Hiccup rolls his eyes as Jack's jaw falls open ever so slightly, allowing out a small sound of disbelief, of hurt and tenderness somehow wound up into a single emotion.

"Alright, fine. To Jack Frost."

"To Jack Frost," Merida and Rapunzel echo, and as their glasses clink together, he finally can't hold himself up anymore. His fingers are numb, and he doesn't so much as try to stop himself from slipping down, something like a sob catching in his throat as the window falls away and the other three are erased from his sight.

He's falling, if only for a moment, and it occurs to him that maybe hitting the ground wouldn't be the worst thing in the world.

But it won't do anything. It would be useless, so he stops himself moments before impact, twisting his shepherd's crook around to get a better grip on the wind, letting it buoy him back into the air. And then he's moving backwards, away from the castle, faster and faster, sailing up and through the clouds until Rapunzel's kingdom is entirely obscured, until all three of them are only memories, the same to him that he is to them.

He's choking on his tears, gasping through them as they freeze instantly on his cheeks and chin and neck. But he doesn't allow himself to form thoughts, and so he just keeps moving, eventually turning around and squeezing his eyes shut and clinging to his staff, taking slow breaths, embracing the brittle wood that's the only thing he has left.

And as hard as he tries, he can't get their faces out of his head—"their aged faces, eyes dulled, hair colorless, superimposed over the glowing, blazing, vibrant, colorful children that they once were, that they all were.

"You said you'd always believe." He doesn't mean to say it, but the words come out anyways, and then he's screaming, into the winds, as loud as he can, because there's no one left to hear anyways. \_"You promised that you'd always believe!"\_

There is no answer, and he imagines that he can still hear their laughter, all the way back from the castle, haunting him and reminding him relentlessly of how stupid he ever was to hope.

End  
file.